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# New European Security Strategy – The Transatlantic Factor

*Annegret Bendiek and Markus Kaim*

A wave of new foreign policy and security challenges have made certain aspects of earlier European Union strategic thinking obsolete. In response, Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has announced her intention to prepare a new European Security Strategy (ESS). The process is to proceed in two stages. First, an analysis of the current strategic coordinates within which the EU's foreign and security policy must operate will be presented to the summit of heads of state and government in Brussels in June 2015. The second stage will comprise an inclusive, pan-European debate on the EU's external and security roles. The results of that discussion will flow into a new European Security Strategy, whose publication is due in 2016. The question for the member states today is what kind of role the EU should play in the world, and in particular what its relationship to the United States should look like.

The first European Security Strategy (ESS), *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, was adopted in 2003 by the then fifteen EU member states. It represented above all a response to strife within Europe in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq war. Javier Solana, then EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, was tasked in summer 2003 with formulating an ESS. The document would for the first time define shared foreign policy priorities, in order to promote coherent collective external action.

The geopolitical scope of this first ESS, which the European Council adopted on 12 December 2003, was ambitious: The European Union, it stated, was “inevitably

a global player” and therefore had to be “ready to share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world”. Transnational terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, failing and failed states, and organised crime were identified as the main threats to Europe's security. The *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy* of 2008 honed the basic thrust of the ESS without setting any completely new directions. But in recent years calls to revise or reformulate the document have grown increasingly insistent, on the grounds that the security environment has witnessed fundamental change since 2003

and a modification is long overdue. The governments of the now twenty-eight member states long recoiled at the thought of revision, fearing renewed division over strategic questions such as transatlantic relations. But the latest turmoil in Europe's backyard has generated a head of pressure for strategic repositioning. In June 2015, after consultations with the foreign and defence ministers, the High Representative will present the report on changes in the security environment commissioned by the European Council. She expects the heads of state and government to grant her a mandate to pursue the process of reforming the ESS. Mogherini has already indicated a number of cornerstones: In the most turbulent era in Europe since the end of the Cold War, she says, she is convinced that the European Union has not been properly aware of its role as a "superpower". At the Munich Security Conference in February 2015 she argued similarly ambitiously that the transition from global chaos to a new, peaceful world order was the Union's uppermost external objective. In April 2015 Nathalie Tocci, Special Advisor to the High Representative on the ESS, distilled the analysis down to three aspects: the world is "more connected, more contested and more complex". This, she said, should lead the Union to reflect more closely on six components of its external action: a) stronger engagement in the Balkans and towards Turkey; b) preserving and developing the European post-war order; c) crises in North Africa and the Middle East; d) relations with Africa; e) the transatlantic partnership and EU-Nato relations; and f) improving cooperation with Asia and an associated renewal of the system of multilateral institutions.

A sequence of three steps is required. Firstly, the new security environment must be analysed. Secondly, a regional prioritisation of EU external relations will be unavoidable. And thirdly, transatlantic security relations will have to be redefined in parts.

## The New Quality of Security Challenge

"Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free." To many observers, this introductory sentence of the 2003 ESS reveals just how much the European Union's external environment – and internal situation – have changed in the interim. Following the shock of the attacks of 11 September 2001 and divisions over the 2003 Iraq War, the priority of the first ESS was for the European Union to contribute its own crisis management to the global system of multilateral institutions, exercising autonomy above all vis-à-vis the United States. Firstly, the European Union defined itself as a global actor in the narrower sense, on the grounds that its international political influence was based on the existence of a system of effective multilateral institutions and accepted norms and principles that were worth preserving. Secondly, it staked a multi-dimensional, global claim: "In contrast to the massive visible threat in the Cold War, none of the new threats is purely military; nor can any be tackled by purely military means. Each requires a mixture of instruments." Two necessary preconditions for that global policing role can be read into these passages. Firstly, it was assumed that the European Union and its neighbourhood had been permanently pacified and that this space would be shaped according to the principles of the Charter of Paris. Or put another way, that Europe would be united, free and at peace with itself. Secondly, it was assumed that the integration process would continue to deepen uninterruptedly, with implicit faith in the appeal of a successful European model. On that basis the security-creating effect of the European Union was to be expanded across the entire globe.

Not quite twelve years after adoption of the ESS, we can identify seven qualitative changes of strategic significance that should guide the planned revision.

**Firstly**, the European Union and its member states find themselves confronted with an erosion of the Euro-Atlantic order.

This is reflected in a functional hollowing out of the multilateral institutions and in the weakening of agreed principles and universal values. Russia's annexation of Crimea altered European borders by force for the first time in decades. The military conflict over (eastern) Ukraine represents a manifestation of Russia's strategy of preventing any expansion of European and transatlantic modes of cooperation and integration into its "sphere of influence", by military means if necessary. Elsewhere, the advance of the "Islamic State" in Iraq, Syria and lately also Libya challenges the foundations and territorial boundaries of the system of states in the Middle East and North Africa.

This deterioration results, **secondly**, in a simultaneity of what are in some respects very different crises threatening the Union's interests and values at different levels. A particular coincidence of crises in 2014 reveals especially clearly the contours of the conflicts of goals in foreign policy: To contain the Ukraine crisis Europe has enforced sweeping sanctions against Russia – but needs Moscow's support in the nuclear talks with Tehran. Similarly, the Union has ostracised the Syrian regime for atrocities in the civil war – but winds up needing its assistance against the so-called Islamic State.

The panorama of crises along Europe's periphery has, **thirdly**, reframed the question of the security role of the United States and the degree of European responsibility. After negative experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States under President Barack Obama has made an inward turn, now concentrating more on concerns at home. Its engagement is recognisably more selective and domestic political resistance to an active global policing role greater than at any time since 1945. At least in the Euro-Atlantic space the United States is leaving behind a geopolitical vacuum, although there are initial signs of individual European states being willing to step in. In the Ukraine conflict for example, Washington left the Europeans, in the first place

Germany (and France), to lead the negotiations. Regardless of the political frame (NATO or European Union) there is good reason to believe that the Union will have to assume greater long-term security responsibility in its neighbourhood, albeit in close transatlantic consultation.

**Fourthly**, the trend for foreign policy and security formats based on "bi- and minilateralism" and other "coalitions of the willing" has consolidated. The growing importance of the so-called Normandy format and the "Weimar triangle" reflect a renationalisation of European external policy that has been recognisable for some years, and is associated with constant or even rising pressure to attain geopolitical influence. Against this background, some of the larger European states are acting in close coordination with their fellow EU members, but outside the formal mechanisms of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

The question of the partners and international organisations with and within which the European Union seeks to realise particular goals is, **fifthly**, decisive for European external policy. The rise of "new" powers like China has made such a reorientation necessary over recent years, as have the inward turn in US foreign policy and Russia's paradigm shift. The hackneyed formula of "strategic partnerships" has turned out to be largely an empty shell. So depending on the policy field, European external policy will often need to attract suitable willing partners. The Union will have to admit that its (financial) instruments are too limited to play a leading global policing role.

**Sixthly**, the basic assumption of the 2003 ESS, that the success of the integration process would serve as a model for others on a global scale, has crumbled. Alternative regional settings and organisations are gaining ground internationally. Numerous European states that have assumed responsibility to uphold the Euro-Atlantic security policy are recognisably turning inwards under the pressures of budget constraints

in the aftermath of the European debt and financial crisis, dysfunctionalities in their political systems, and above all the rise of national political forces that regard globalisation and the European integration process as threats and would rather isolate their countries from the world than shape it. All these developments also appear to weaken the European Union's internal cohesion.

These developments are, **seventhly**, all the more contradictory in that the structural transformation of international politics and the associated loss of national autonomy become ever more prominent. The scope and intensity of foreign policy management have become so complex as to overstretch the resources of individual states, as becomes obvious in global challenges such as creating a regime to limit climate change or reviving global trade talks. The same diagnosis also applies to security policy, for example in a regional perspective guaranteeing Euro-Atlantic security, or internationally in crisis management. Acting alone, even the big three EU member states are barely up to the diverse tasks involved in international crisis management.

### Setting Regional Priorities

In the Treaty of Lisbon the European Union reiterated the global ambition set out in the ESS: "The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world." (Art. 21 [1] Treaty on European Union)

It is uncontested that the European Union and its member states possess a stronger global presence than ever before, above all through trade ties and delegations. Nor is there any doubt that the European Union is fundamentally affected by global developments, be they climate change, uncontrolled migration or Islamist terrorism. What would appear questionable, however, is the conclusion the European Union has

drawn in the past from this, namely, to define itself explicitly as a global actor.

The crises and conflicts of 2014, including the Ukraine crisis and the advance of the "Islamic State", have revived the question of the European Union's security impact and geopolitical horizons. One of the few positive consequences to have emerged from these crises is the strategic premium placed upon EU external action, which should be harnessed to drive the ESS process.

The lack of collective military capabilities and cumbersome, even inefficient political decision-making processes make it harder for the European Union to fulfil its global ambitions. The region for which the Union can and should bear primary geopolitical responsibility stretches to the Euro-Atlantic periphery: North Africa, the Middle East and the eastern neighbourhood. Here there are many – almost too many – foreign policy challenges waiting for the Union. At the same time, Europe's prioritisation should complement America's, with the European Union active in this area in order to allow the United States to scale back its commitment and engage more strongly elsewhere. The initial contours of the ESS reform process underline this accentuation, with the empirical finding that for all the rhetoric, the centre of gravity of EU action lies in its own neighbourhood. In order to fulfil its role as a fully-fledged global actor in the long term, the European Union therefore needs to assume geopolitical responsibilities primarily in its own broader neighbourhood.

If it is to operate effectively as a global force for order, the European Union requires political partners with which it is broadly in agreement about objectives and instruments, first and foremost the United States. Experience since 2003 has shown that a European foreign and security policy can function neither in opposition to the United States nor in complete dependency. Europe not only needs a position of its own for dealing with its periphery, but also a joint position towards Washington, which

member states both assert towards and coordinate with the United States.

In recent years the transatlantic security relationship has been characterised on both sides of the Atlantic largely by growing uncertainty about what the United States and Europe can expect from one another. The crises of 2014 have again underlined the extent to which transatlantic relations continue to guarantee Europe's security and supply European action in the world with the necessary resources. Europe possesses only limited capacity to operate independently in global dimensions. The European Union will neither be in a position to defuse the nuclear rivalry in the Middle East between Iran and Israel (and possibly soon also Saudi Arabia), nor will it succeed in stemming the collapse of Arab statehood with all its consequences for transnational terrorism and migration. In all these conflicts Europe needs the United States. And in this context any transatlantic alienation must be understood as a significant threat to European interests.

It also appears questionable whether the member states will muster up the necessary action in the foreseeable future. In the short term a communitisation of foreign and security policy is just as unrealistic an expectation as a tangible increase in national defence budgets. Furthermore, from a normative perspective the United States remains Europe's natural ally. Together the two sides form a transatlantic community of values and interests founded on ideas of democracy, rule of law, human rights and market economy.

The division of labour between the two partners is no less important. Today the United States is looking more strongly to the Pacific, whereas Europe concentrates on Africa and the Middle East. Such a sharing of tasks should be recognised as a major pillar of transatlantic cooperation, and as an expression of specific competencies in US-EU and NATO-EU cooperation.

## **Transatlantic Cooperation on Internal Security and Cybersecurity**

Close transatlantic coordination within NATO, as well as between the EU and the United States in the field of internal security, opens up possibilities to address military, civil and policing aspects under a single political roof.

During the past twenty years the European Union has successively expanded the powers and resources it dedicates to internal security, and already possesses a strategy of its own on the issue – which like the ESS is to be reformed during the coming months. As far as the ESS is concerned, the crux regarding both threats and responses will be to make the connection between internal and external affairs, for example concerning cybersecurity or IS fighters from EU member states.

Given that non-military components play a major role in non-linear strategies, countering such strategies also means working together with civil and international organisations. In this context the European Union should press for the UN to clarify the international legal position on hybrid warfare. The European Union could work with NATO to address the shared threat situation and use that experience as a model for cooperation with other international organisations. Here the member states need to intensify the exchange of information among their own intelligence services and with NATO, and place it on a new legitimising base. This will require a codex to regulate relations both among EU member states and with US and other allied intelligence services. Access to the internet and the integrity, authenticity and confidentiality of data held there have become crucial questions of the twenty-first century. The state, critical infrastructure, the internal market and the transatlantic economic space as a whole are, as parts of an increasingly networked world, heavily reliant upon the reliable functioning of information and communication technology and the internet. Guarding cybersecurity is thus a central shared task of state, economy and society.

Above all it is a development and research task for the defence and security industries in the digital internal market and in the future Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

Nor have the states of NATO and the European Union yet found an answer to the deliberate disinformation, infiltration and subversion of European societies. In cyberspace there is a risk of the foundations of the democratic liberal order, like a free press and freedom of expression, being undermined. The Russian government not only runs anti-Western websites and television stations, but even employs its own bloggers to manipulate apparently neutral online forums. The original function of these discursive spaces as instruments of liberty threatens to turn into the opposite. The unbridled openness of the internet offers freely accessible platforms not only for opposition forces, but also for state propaganda, anti-Western and anti-libertarian voices, and even justifications of terrorism.

Through the Freedom Online Coalition, twenty-six governments are seeking to prevent such an instrumentalisation of the online sphere for anti-democratic initiatives. But the question for the NATO and EU members of the coalition is whether more active intervention to correct the gravest distortions is not in fact necessary. In democracies, public opinion is an increasingly important factor constraining foreign and security policy. To completely neglect it risks playing into the hands of the enemies of the open society.

### **Enhancing NATO and Consequences for the CSDP**

The expanding role of NATO in the course of the Ukraine crisis also affects the security and defence profile of the European Union, especially its relationship to the United States. This will have consequences for the future development of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

The financial scope of EU member states in the fields of security and defence will remain limited for the foreseeable future, if not indeed shrink. Russia's annexation of Crimea and destabilisation of eastern Ukraine have sparked a renaissance of collective defence under the NATO umbrella. Consequently, European countries that are also members of NATO will tend to dedicate their financial resources – and even more so their watchfulness – to the North Atlantic Alliance rather than the European Union.

Moreover, earlier discussions about the European Union acquiring security autonomy vis-à-vis the United States have largely ebbed away. As NATO's response to the Ukraine crisis demonstrates, the United States, "pivot to Asia" rhetoric notwithstanding, continues to regard itself as a European power and is treated as such by the governments of many European countries. If it is true that the Ukraine crisis has politically reinvigorated NATO, it has also weakened the CSDP by the same measure.

Given that central coordinates have shifted, the new ESS will need to reassess the relationship of European states to NATO. Of course the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union should keep working to improve relations and expand cooperation. But the latest meeting between the NATO foreign ministers and the High Representative in May 2015 confirmed again how strongly the known political barriers will continue to hamper substantial cooperation.

In view of these difficulties, the ESS will have to take a lead by showing how the EU member states in NATO could intensify security and defence cooperation *with one another*. This would not only open up an opportunity to better integrate those countries that are sceptical towards the CSDP into a European security framework. It would also allow new forms of cooperation, where a series of non-aligned states are seeking to work more closely with NATO in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis.

The European Union, as the institutional frame for decisions, coordination, initiatives

and operative solutions, can simplify participation of EU states in NATO activities – and in the process strengthen Europe’s hand and facilitate contributions to defence and crisis management that the states are no longer able to supply individually. The EU level is also better suited to achieving transatlantic coordinating independent European operations and contributions to other organisations such as the UN.

## **Larger Contributions to UN Peacekeeping**

Another aspect touching on transatlantic security relations that the ESS should address is European contributions to UN peacekeeping in general, and in the Union’s broader neighbourhood in particular. Not only are high US expectations focused here, but the European Union possesses an essential geopolitical interest in their success. The number and scope of UN missions has grown steadily over recent years, while participation by EU member states has steadily fallen. Today European states provide only 6,000 soldiers on UN missions. This is not only less than half of the figure ten years ago, but also represents just 7 percent of the current total of 90,000. Although France, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries represent exceptions and the United Kingdom is just “rediscovering” peacekeeping missions, overall the dominant perspective in European capitals is that UN missions are unprofessionally run, distract from NATO and EU security obligations, and are irrelevant to the question of transatlantic burden-sharing.

With two thirds of UN missions operating in active crisis regions, there is large and rising demand for high-grade military capabilities of the kind that EU states are particularly well-equipped to provide, for example reconnaissance and helicopter gunships. Against this background, the United States approves of EU states playing a larger role in peacekeeping missions, seeing this as an important geopolitical contribution of mutual benefit and an expression

of fair transatlantic burden-sharing. Especially the battlegroups that have been fully operational since 2007 could be put to use in UN operations.

Larger national contributions by EU members or more engagement by the Union are both conceivable. One advantage of the latter model is that the Union as a whole is free of any suspicion of pursuing national interests through participation in UN operations. The European Union also possesses complementary humanitarian instruments and civilian crisis management tools.

## **Conclusion**

The ESS must fulfil three important requirements. Firstly, it must take account of the changing policy frame, including European affairs more broadly as well as security itself. Secondly it must formulate the European Union’s foreign and security policy ambitions more realistically and more modestly than to date. And as a consequence, thirdly, it must place relations between the European Union and the United States on a new footing. That applies to the bilateral dimension, and even more so to shared ideas about the international order and relations to other actors in the international system.

The planned reform of the ESS should clearly reflect the search for a better institutional framework on which to build a transatlantic security partnership. That would require a slimmer, more efficient decision-making process for internal coordination within the Union. Function-specific multilateralisms involving the Union or individual member states are the appropriate framework for transatlantic coordination of political strategies (Peter Rudolf). But such a bundling of transatlantic cooperation is an ambitious endeavour. The EU member states would therefore be well-advised to use the reform of the ESS to renew the transatlantic cooperation.

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